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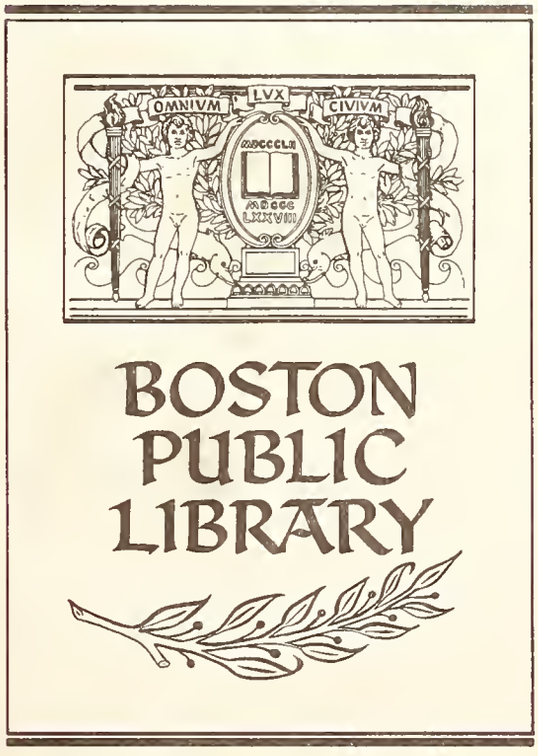

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Transportation Strategies for the Back Bay

March 1990

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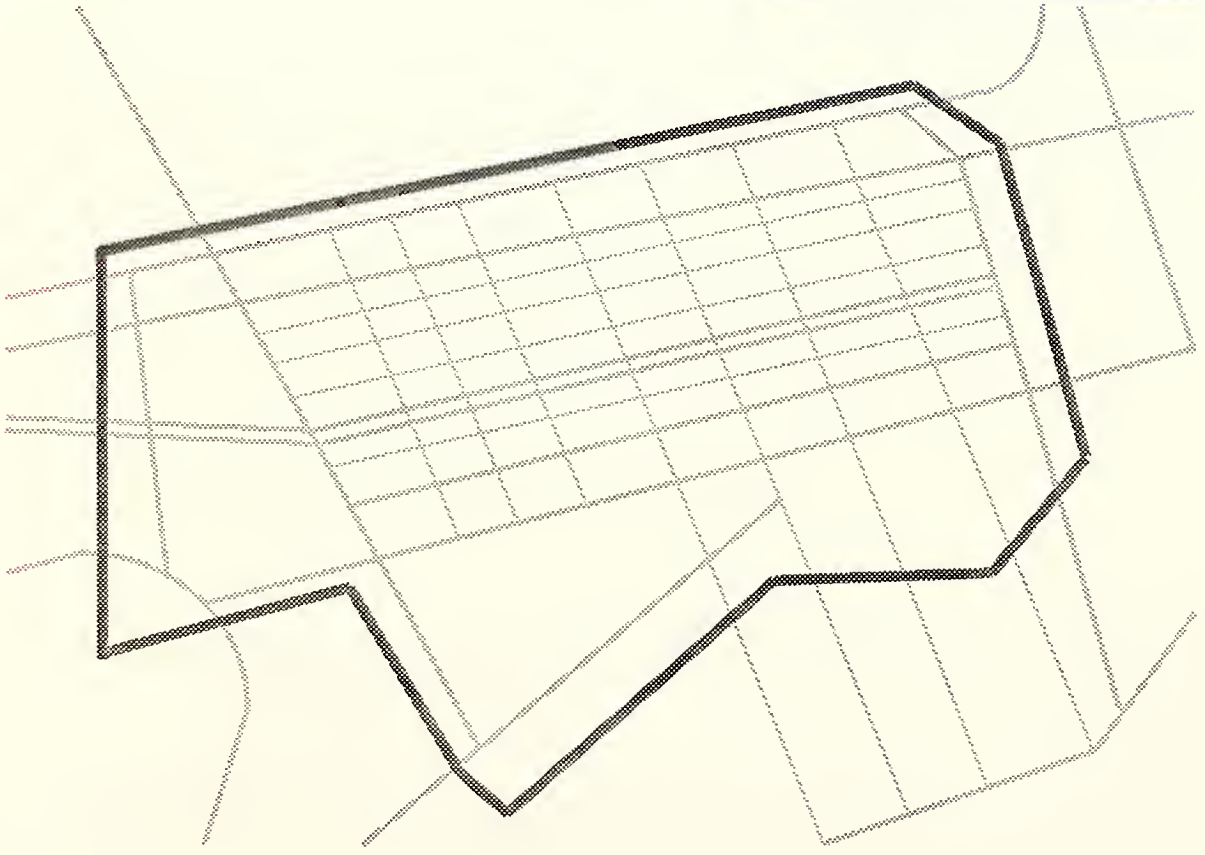
Overview of the Plan



Boston Transportation Department

with assistance from

Cambridge Systematics, Inc.
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates
Bruce Campbell and Associates
CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares and Casendino, Inc.

Boston Transportation Department

Transportation Strategies for the Back Bay

Meeting Agenda: March 28, 1989
Rabb Lecture Hall

1. **John Riordan** (Office of Neighborhood Services)
   - Introduction of Project

2. **Richard Dimino** (Transportation Commissioner)
   - Description of the Plan
   - Accomplishments to Date

3. **Robert Lepore** (Cambridge Systematics)
   - Review of the Plan

4. **Joseph Beggan** (Transportation Department)
   - What Happens Next

5. **John Riordan** (Office of Neighborhood Services)
   - Wrap-up of Presentation

Questions and Answer Period

Executive Summary

This executive summary presents an overview of the proposed Back Bay transportation plan. The purpose of the plan is to recommend strategies to improve transportation in the Back Bay and to provide a comprehensive framework for undertaking future transportation planning efforts. The plan was developed as part of the Back Bay Transportation Strategies Project.

Project History

The Back Bay Transportation Strategies Project was initiated by the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) to address a recognized need for a comprehensive transportation plan for the Back Bay. The Back Bay transportation plan responds to concerns about recent and projected development trends in the area. These concerns are underscored by the following two points:

- During the past twenty years, over 6 million square feet in office and retail space has been constructed in the Back Bay. This represents 40% of the current total amount of development in the area. This growth has increased the demand on the area's traffic and parking facilities, and has raised concerns about ensuring the quality of life in the area's residential neighborhoods.

- Over the next twenty years, over 5 million square feet of new office, retail, hotel and residential development is projected for construction. If the use of transit and vehicle occupancy rates (people per vehicle) for commuters do not increase over this period in the Back Bay and downtown Boston, new development in these areas would increase traffic volumes by more than 25 percent on Back Bay streets.

The Boston Transportation Department worked with the Boylston street Citizen Review Committee (CRC) to initiate the Back Bay Transportation Strategies project. Together, the BTD and the CRC resolved a number of issues, such as defining the scope of work, securing funding for the project, and establishing a working committee to help guide the project. The working committee met two dozen times during the course of the project. The membership included the BTD, the BRA, the project consultants and representatives of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay, the Bay Village Neighborhood Association, the St. Botolph Citizen's Committee, the Back Bay Association and the Newbury street

League. In addition, numerous meetings were held with residents, business groups and public agencies.

The project started in the Fall of 1988 and included two phases. The first phase of the project studied in great depth the existing and future transportation issues affecting the Back Bay. The findings of this effort were presented at two public meetings in June of 1989. The project's second phase began immediately after the public meeting. This phase included the evaluation of a number of strategies, leading to the development of the transportation plan for the Back Bay.

Overview of the Plan

The transportation plan for the Back Bay is structured around six objectives that articulate the plan's purpose. The plan's objectives recognize the relationships between the various components of the Back Bay transportation system, which include vehicular traffic, parking, transit service, goods delivery, and pedestrian flow.

Nearly fifty strategies are proposed under the six objectives. The strategies are sensitive to the need to balance the demands for the transportation system by the area's residential, commercial, retail and institutional communities. The strategies are also intended to improve conditions without shifting problems to areas outside the Back Bay. The large number of actions described indicate that no one strategy can solve the Back Bay's transportation problems. Only a range of actions that consist of physical improvements, management revisions and policy initiatives can adequately address the area's concerns.

The plan's six objectives are listed below with a general overview of the strategies proposed for the Back Bay:

Objective 1. Implement programs that encourage less drive alone commuting

The intent of the plan is to increase the percent of commuters who use transit from the current level of 46 percent to 52 percent, and to increase vehicle occupancy rates from 1.2 riders per vehicle to 1.5 riders per vehicle. Reducing the percentage of commuters who drive alone is the most effective way to achieve these goals. Strategies proposed include establishing transit and vehicle use goals for new and existing development, and developing a private sector Transportation

Management Association to expand the involvement of the business community in transportation issues.

Objective 2. Expand and strengthen the use of public transportation

The intent is to increase the use of transit by commuters from 46 to 52 percent. Programs are proposed to expand the MBTA system and to strengthen existing MBTA and private bus carrier service. This includes expanding the MBTA park and ride program, adding commuter rail service to the south shore (Old Colony) communities, and extending the rapid transit system to the South Boston/Fort Point Channel area. Other proposals seek to improve Green Line operations and private bus carrier service.

Objective 3. Improve traffic circulation to reduce intrusion in residential areas and to improve access to the commercial area

The circulation program identified for the Back Bay proposes measures to enhance access from the western end of the area; provide new, more direct Turnpike access; and, improve traffic flow on local streets. Proposals to enhance access from the western end of the Back Bay include a potential new ramp connection to Storrow Drive, enforcement programs on Massachusetts avenue, traffic signal system improvements, and a consistent internal and external signage program. A new eastbound on-ramp at Arlington street and a new westbound off-ramp at Berkeley street are proposed to facilitate direct access between the Back Bay and the Turnpike. Strategies are also proposed to improve traffic flow on Boylston street, Massachusetts avenue, Stuart street and St. James avenue, through parking enforcement, traffic signal system improvements and several intersection redesigns.

Objective 4. Maximize on-street and off-street parking resources

The parking proposals seek to improve the management of existing resources and to provide direction for future projects. Recently implemented enforcement programs have increased the availability of on-street parking by reducing long-term meter parking. This demonstrates the benefit of improved management of on-street resources. Off-street parking resources can also be maximized with improved management. The proposed strategies for on-street parking management

include weekday and Saturday enforcement. Further use of off-street parking facilities would be encouraged through improved marketing, advertising and reduced rate structures for short-term parking and overnight residential parking. Other proposals include provisions for bus and taxi operations in new development.

Objective 5. Better manage the many "special events" held in the area

The intent is to improve the management of large-scale events to reduce their impact on area mobility and the accessibility of on-street parking. Strategies include strengthening the City's regulations for issuing street occupancy permits for road races, walkathons and street fairs; expanding advertising of upcoming events to ensure timely public notification of each event; and the development of a transportation management plan for the Hynes Convention Center.

Objective 6. Enhance pedestrian circulation and safety

The intent of the pedestrian proposals is to improve the balance between pedestrian and vehicular needs. The plan includes a variety of strategies and design standards to simplify pedestrian crossings at high activity intersections; to site street furniture (such as newspaper stands and mailboxes) and to select materials for handicapped ramps, tree grates and sidewalk surfaces. Another category of improvements includes implementing pedestrian amenities on several key roadways such as Boylston street, Newbury street, Dartmouth street and Arlington street.

Next Steps

With nearly fifty strategies, it is important that the implementation process is well coordinated. The Boston Transportation Department (BTD) will be responsible for coordinating the implementation program that is described below.

Complete the Proposed Plan - The draft transportation plan will be circulated for public review in April. The plan will be finalized and adopted by the BTD by early summer.

Refine the Implementation Schedule - The plan identifies general time frames to implement the proposed strategies. The BTD will refine the schedule based on input from the appropriate agencies. The revised

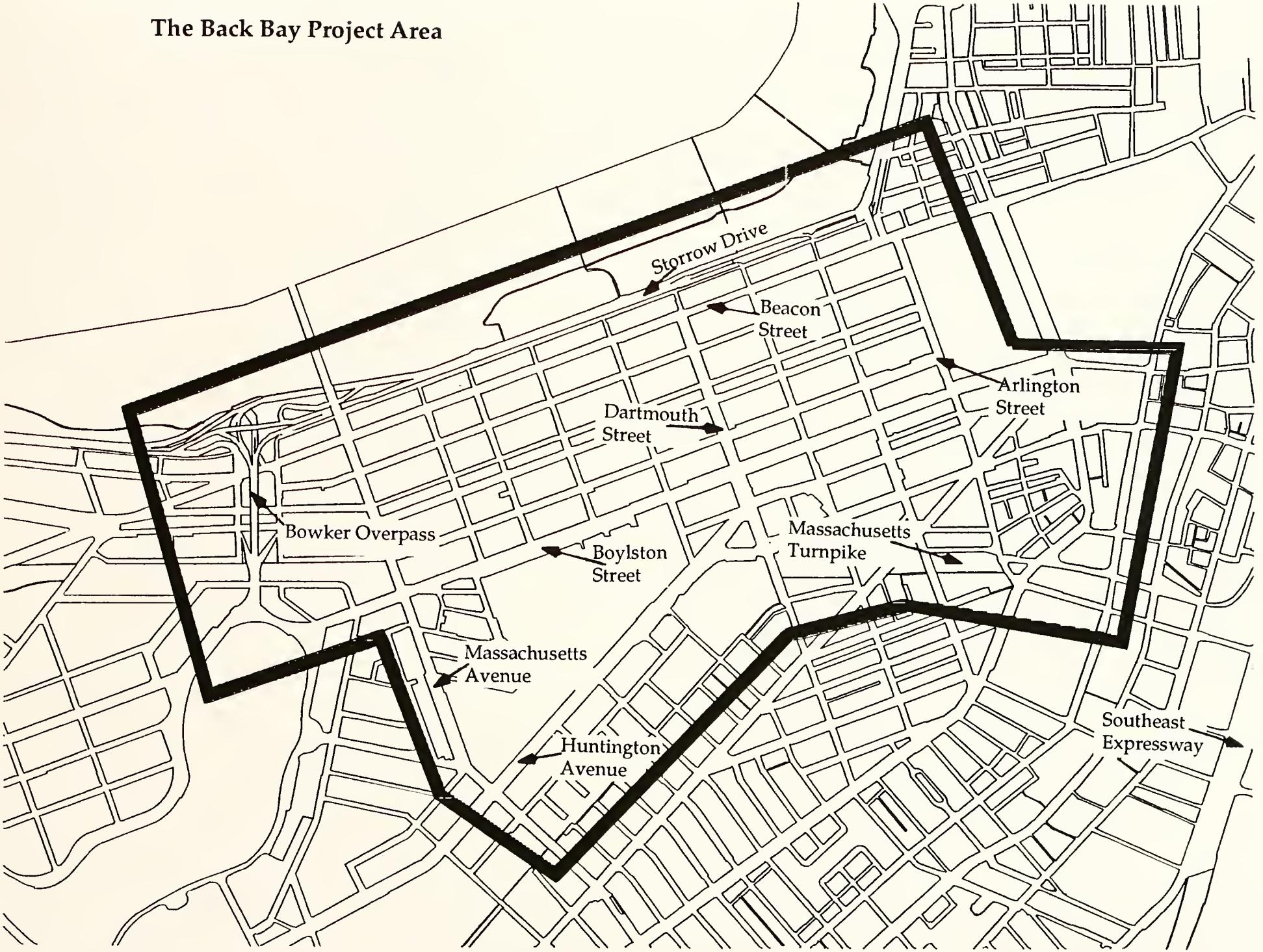
schedule will be reviewed and updated regularly to monitor the progress of the plan.

Secure Funding - Most actions do not require much funding and can be implemented within current operating budget resources. In areas where funding sources are needed and have not been identified, the BTD will work with the appropriate public agencies and private sector sources to identify and secure the necessary funding.

Begin the Implementation Process - The BTD will initiate and coordinate the implementation process for all of the recommendations. The BTD will give priority to those strategies under its jurisdiction that can be implemented within the next year. Already, much has been done since the public meeting last June. Recommendations for more enforcement were implemented on weekdays starting last November on Newbury and Boylston streets. As a result, long-term parking at meters, double parking and congestion have been cut considerably. Very recently, new enforcement on Saturday was implemented on these streets. Other strategies that would be initiated soon include signal timing improvements, several policy revisions, and expansion of the Traffic Relief Program (enforcement) to Massachusetts avenue.

Initiate Feasibility Studies - Several strategies require more study to determine their engineering and environmental feasibility. Several State agencies, including the Massachusetts Department of Public Works (MDPW), the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority (MTA) and the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) will be responsible for these efforts. The BTD will request that these agencies investigate those strategies that fall under their jurisdiction. The BTD will work closely with these agencies to move the review and study process forward in a timely manner. For those strategies determined to be feasible, the BTD will work cooperatively with the agencies and the public to facilitate their implementation.

Conclusion

The strategies that are proposed in the transportation plan will improve existing conditions in the Back Bay, while the framework of the plan seeks to maintain these improvements well into the future. This approach will improve the quality of life in residential areas, enhance access to the commercial area and allow the continued expansion of the local economy.

The Back Bay Project Area